

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for providing proof of mailing one or more mail pieces by a mailer, the method comprises the steps of:
 - (a) placing an identification code on individual mail pieces with a postage meter at a location other than a post office, wherein the identification code identifies the recipient of the mail piece and uniquely identifies individual mail pieces;
 - (b) transmitting the identification code to a data center;
 - (c) depositing one or more mail pieces with the post office at the post office or at a location other than the post office;
 - (d) attempting reading by the post office at a location other than the post office or at the post office the identification code that is on one more mail pieces;
 - (e) retrieving the identification code from the data center and the identification code read by the post office; and
 - (f) notifying the postage meter that individual identification codes have been received by the data center and individual mail pieces identification codes have been read or not read by the post office.
2. The method claimed in claim 1, wherein the postage meter is an electronic postage meter.
3. The method claimed in claim 1, wherein the postage meter is a computer postage meter with a secure storage device.
4. The method claimed in claim 1, further including the step of:
printing at the postage meter a certificate indicating that the identification code has been read by the post office.
5. The method claimed in claim 4, further including the step of:
printing on the certificate the date the mail piece was read.
6. The method claimed in claim 5, further including the step of:

printing on the certificate the time the mail piece was read.

7. The method claimed in claim 1, further including the step of:
printing at the postage meter a certificate indicating that the identification code has not been read by the post office after a certain period of time has elapsed after the data center has received the identification code from the meter.
8. The method claimed in claim 1, wherein the identification code is a unique number.
9. The method claimed in claim 1, wherein the identification code comprises: the serial number of the postage meter, and the date and time that the identification code was affixed to the mail piece.
10. The method claimed in claim 1, further including the steps of:
 - (a) printing a postal indicia on the mail piece for the payment of postage and any related postal fees; and
 - (b) charging the postage meter for printing the postal indicia.
11. The method claimed in claim 10, further including the step of:
refunding the postage meter account for part or all of the postage and fees that have been placed on mail pieces having identification codes that have not been read by the post office after a certain period of time has elapsed after the data center has received the identification code from the meter.
12. The method claimed in claim 1, further including the step of:
notifying the mailer via telephone that individual identification codes have been received by the data center and individual mail pieces' identification codes have been read or not read by the post office.

13. The method claimed in claim 1, further including the step of:
notifying the mailer via e-mail that individual identification codes have been received by the data center, and individual mail pieces' identification codes have been read or not read by the post office.
14. The method claimed in claim 1, further including the step of:
notifying the mailer via facsimile that individual identification codes have been received by the data center, and individual mail pieces' identification codes have been read or not read by the post office.
15. The method claimed in claim 1, further including the steps of:
identifying the mailer's reference number of the document contained in the mail piece.
16. The method claimed in claim 15, further including:
 - (a) printing at the postage meter a certificate indicating that the identification code has not been read by the post office after a certain period of time has elapsed after the data center has received the identification code from the meter; and
 - (b) printing the mailer's reference number on the certificate of induction.
17. The method claimed in claim 16, further including the step of:
printing the mailer's name on the certificate of induction.
18. The method claimed in claim 15, further including the step of:
 - (a) printing at the postage meter a certificate indicating that the identification code has been read by the post office; and
 - (b) printing the mailer's reference number on the certificate of induction.
19. The method claimed in claim 18, further including the step of:
printing the mailer's name on the certificate of induction.